

LITTLE SAIGON

“Little Saigon” refers to the area within the Downtown Urban Center between Interstate 5 and Rainier Avenue S. and north of S. Weller Street to S. Main Street.

Historically home to many establishments featuring jazz music, today South Jackson Street and Little Saigon have grown into a lively center for Southeast Asian American businesses. Little Saigon’s existing neighborhood character includes a mix of commercial and light industrial businesses, merchandise displays that spill out onto sidewalks, some residential uses, and vacant or under-developed parcels, many in surface parking use. Existing zoning allows an assortment of commercial and industrial-commercial uses. Some large development sites have been assembled from small parcels.

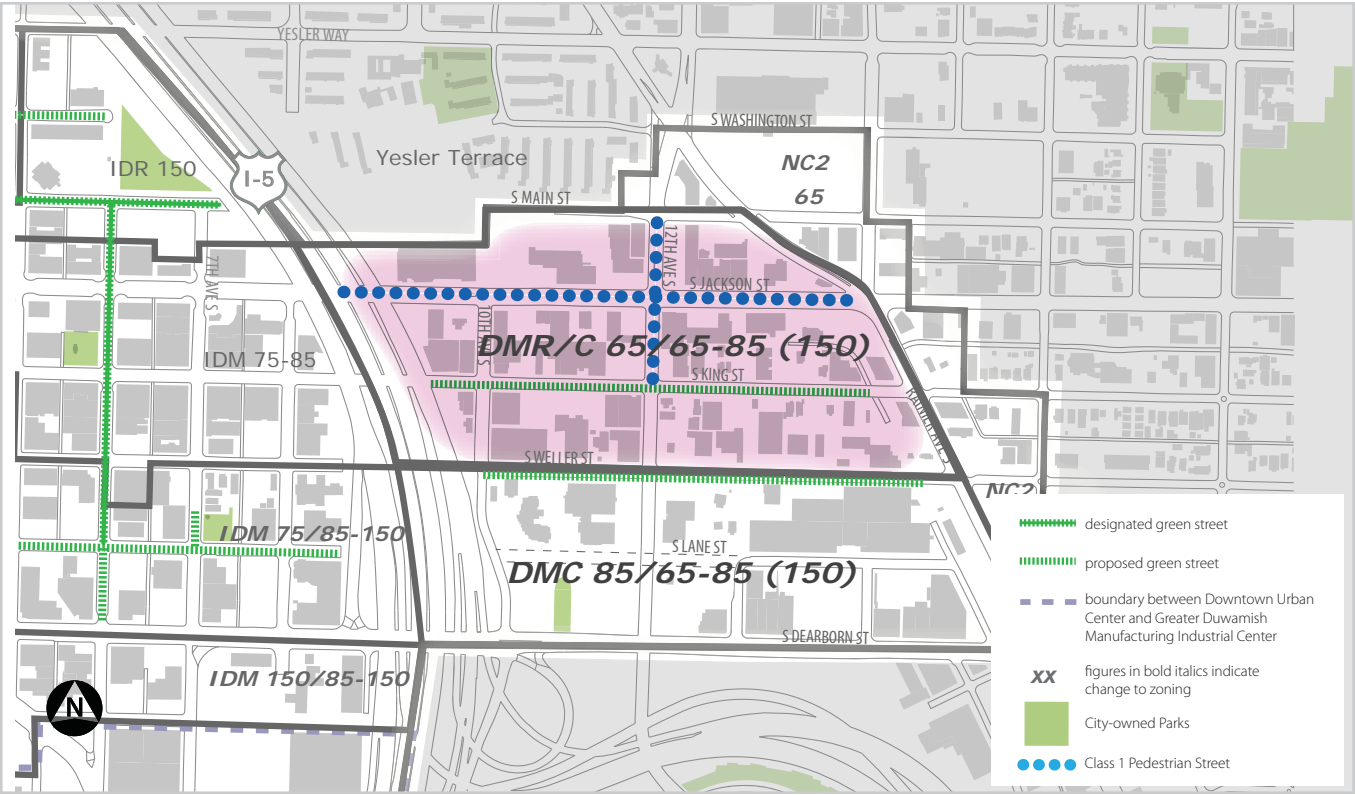
Growth and change is likely in Little Saigon over the next 10-20 years under any scenario, due to the area’s acces-

sible location within the Downtown Urban Center at the crossroads of transportation routes serving the Rainier Valley, Central District and Downtown Seattle. Development has been slow, but an entrepreneurial spirit has fostered small business activity in existing buildings. Little Saigon’s small businesses generally lease space rather than own the buildings in which they are located, making them vulnerable to displacement as the area redevelops.

Development interest is evident by the several proposed development projects in the area, including a large shopping center project that was recently abandoned. In addition, planning is underway for the redevelopment of the Seattle Housing Authority’s Yesler Terrace neighborhood immediately to the north of Little Saigon. These examples indicate the importance of updating the area’s zoning to enable the character of this unique neighborhood to remain vital while it grows within the Center City.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

An important goal for Little Saigon is retaining and enhancing the successful small, primarily Southeast Asian business community, particularly within the S. Jackson Street/12th Avenue S retail core. This goal was identified in the Chinatown/ International District Neighborhood Plan. In early 2007, DPD commissioned an economic study of Seattle’s Chinatown/International District and Little Saigon with extensive involvement from community stakeholders. The study identified potential economic impacts associated with future growth and development. The study also identified possible strategies to support the small business community in Little Saigon. Many of those strategies are included as part of the recommended South Downtown Land Use Code amendments.





S. King Street

In late 2007, the Office of Economic Development began a second phase of work with the Little Saigon and Chinatown/International District community to evaluate and identify strategies to support small businesses including technical assistance to Asian/Pacific Islander business owners, as well as other businesses. The study included recommendations, many of which are included in the South Downtown Land Use recommendations.

EMERGING LANDSCAPE

Little Saigon was identified as an area in need of public open spaces by the Livable South Downtown EIS, by the Chinatown/International District Strategic Plan (neighborhood plan), and by a recent nexus analysis conducted on behalf of DPD in early 2009. Throughout 2006 and 2007, DPD worked with the community and the Seattle Parks Department to identify potential properties for future parks and open space using

current or future Parks levy funding. In 2008, the Seattle Parks Department, as part of the Pro-Parks Levy, purchased a .31 acre parcel for the expansion of Hing Hay Park in the core of Chinatown/International District.

It is likely that a combination of public and private funding will be needed to meet the need for open space as Little Saigon develops over time. In 2008, DPD worked with members of the community and landscape architects to develop concepts for future pedestrian connections and open spaces throughout the area. Final land use recommendations include a concept for mid-block corridors (see page 63) in Little Saigon that can be combined with land use tools associated with private development such as open space transfer of development rights (TDR), green street setbacks and green street improvements, and the creation of neighborhood open space as part of the incentive zoning program.

Neighborhood Character

Discussion about future land use in Little Saigon raises many questions about the identity of the neighborhood. Some of the constituents of this community include:

- Southeast Asian small business owners and their families;
- Shoppers and patrons of businesses from throughout the region;
- Organizations that are interested in the future of the commercial area;
- Light industrial business owners in the neighborhood;
- Property owners;
- Human service providers;
- Residents within Little Saigon and in surrounding neighborhood areas;



The Livable South Downtown Planning Study focused on land use, with the understanding that other City and community actions will be undertaken through other initiatives. Throughout the study, City staff have worked to understand and address the social complexities of South Downtown neighborhoods. To this end, DPD continues to engage with other City departments, community organizations and stakeholders around the following actions and recommendations:

- **Economic Development.** DPD and the Office of Economic Development have documented key economic issues in Little Saigon and Chinatown/I.D. and propose addressing these issues through business assistance and programs to retain and enhance the business community.
- **Street Vending and Sidewalk Use.** Efforts have been taken to facilitate the continued, legal presence of sidewalk merchandise displays and street vending that characterizes small business operations in Little Saigon and Chinatown/I.D. A formal proposal that will serve area businesses and ensure public safety is anticipated in late 2010.
- **Cultural/ Community Center Land Use.** The community has expressed strong interest in creating a cultural community center that expresses the history and experiences of people in the neighborhood. DPD is recommending a Land Use Code provision to exempt 25,000 square feet of community center use from floor area calculations in the Little Saigon neighborhood in order to help to encourage the creation of such a community center.
- **Future Design Guidelines.** Neighborhood-specific design guidelines for Little Saigon are recommended to be completed in the future.

OBJECTIVES FOR FUTURE LAND USE

1. Encourage incremental growth and development, allowing small businesses to adapt over time.
2. Retain the small- and medium-size character of businesses in the area between Main Street and S. Weller Street. Allow larger commercial uses south of S. Weller Street.
3. Encourage the development of a residential community, including affordable housing.
4. Enliven the area through pedestrian-oriented street front uses and building design features.
5. Retain a neighborhood-scale of development at street level, and ensure access to light and air near taller buildings.
6. Enhance neighborhood livability through the creation of open spaces and green features that link neighborhood areas. Provide spaces for play and relaxation and contribute to the sustainable infrastructure of the area.
7. Reflect Little Saigon's diversity in future development, including the prominence of Southeast Asian-American businesses.



Little Saigon - View of S. Jackson St.

Neighborhood Character and Design

- Sidewalk displays of merchandise legally allowed
- Building setbacks at 45' to establish neighborhood scale street environment
- Most buildings up to 85' in height
- Shape upper-level bulk of buildings
- Neighborhood design guidelines recommended

Mixed-use Neighborhood

Up to 4 FAR of commercial density allowed; limit size of retail to 25,000 s.f. or 50,000 s.f. for grocery stores

"Main street" pedestrian-oriented designs and retail uses required along S. Jackson Street and along 12th Ave S. between S. Main and S. King Streets.



Planning for Yesler Terrace, including open space connections to Little Saigon currently taking place

Hill climb to Yesler Terrace Field and Yesler Community Center suggested

New open space with larger residential development projects:

On larger lots, allow height up to 150' for residential/mixed-use projects that incorporate a mid-block corridor open space amenity and participate in incentive zoning programs.

Add open space and green elements

- Mid-block corridor open space public amenity program
- Encourage park-like "green street" improvements along S. Main Street
- Other open space public amenities an option for projects participating in incentive zoning options

This depiction is presented for illustration purposes only. White structures depict existing buildings

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EXISTING ZONING

Current zoning is a mix of commercial and industrial zones generally inconsistent with the community's vision for Little Saigon. Several zones were analyzed as part of the Livable South Downtown EIS and the rezone analysis beginning on page 109 of this report. Following is a description of existing zoning.

The Commercial 1 (C1) Zone

Approximately one-half of Little Saigon is zoned Commercial 1 (C1), allowing buildings up to 65 feet in height. The function of the C1 zone is to “...provide for an auto-oriented, primarily retail/service commercial area that serves surrounding neighborhoods and the larger community, citywide, or regional clientele.” The Land Use Code specifies that the zone is most appropriate on land “...outside of urban centers and urban villages or, within urban centers or urban villages... and either abutting a state highway, or in use as a shopping mall...” Other criteria include the presence of existing retail, larger lots, access to major arterials and limited pedestrian and transit access.

C1-zoned areas are typified by a variety of commercial building types and site layouts, include one-story commercial structures with extensive surface parking, and multistory residential or office buildings. The size of retail and other commercial uses are not limited in the C1 zone, although the total permissible amount of square feet of office and warehouse uses is limited. Drive-in businesses are allowed. Total allowable FAR is 4.75 for buildings with both residential and commercial uses.

The Industrial Commercial (IC) Zone

The Industrial Commercial (IC) zone in Little Saigon reflects the light-industrial operations and commercial uses present in this area. IC zoning allows buildings up to 65 feet in height. The Industrial Commercial zone is "...intended to promote development of businesses which incorporate a mix of industrial and commercial activities, including light manufacturing and research and development, while accommodating a wide range of other employment activities." The Land Use Code supports IC zones in areas where technology-oriented and research uses may locate. Typical land uses include manufacturing, commercial uses, transportation facilities, institutions and utilities.

The IC zone limits retail uses to 75,000 total square feet; there is no maximum size limit for offices, however the total allowable FAR is 2.5. Like the C1 zone, the IC zone is not particularly pedestrian-oriented and contains relatively few provisions for modifying the bulk, shape or design of a building. However, screening and landscaping is required for blank facades and outdoor uses. Finally, Seattle's Comprehensive Plan contains policies that discourage industrial designations within urban centers and villages.

The Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3) Zone

The Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3) zone is intended to “support or encourage a pedestrian-oriented shopping district that serves the surrounding neighborhood and a larger community, citywide, or regional clientele; that provides comparison shopping for a wide range of retail goods and services; that incorporate offices, business support services, and residences that are compatible with the retail character of the area...” Typical land uses include super-





markets, restaurants, office, hotels, clothing shops, business support services and residences.

The NC3 designation is likely a better match than the other existing zone designations for Little Saigon due in large part to its pedestrian orientation and street front design standards. However, the NC3 zone does not limit the size of most commercial uses, and the incentive zoning program does not apply within NC zones at this time. Finally, the NC3 designation does not include provisions to shape taller buildings.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ZONING

The Downtown Mixed Residential/ Commercial (DMR/C) Zone

Proposed zoning, illustrated by the map on page 54, is intended to support Little Saigon’s continued transition to a mixed-use neighborhood in which workers, residents and visitors can benefit from access to jobs, services and transportation choices. Future zoning will also allow the use of incentive zoning programs to provide neighborhood amenities that are currently lacking.

While the DMR/C zone has only been applied to areas of the Downtown Urban Center north of the commercial core in the past, the zone provides an appropriate scale of development and mix of uses for Little Saigon. The DMR/C zone is intended to “provide a mixed use community where housing and associated services and amenities predominate.

Office, retail and other commercial uses shall be compatibly integrated with the predominant residential character at low to moderate densities.” Additionally, the DMR zone is intended for “those areas containing housing or having housing potential where larger scale non-residential serving commercial development exists and is likely to remain.”

The DMR/C zone, as modified for this area, is intended to allow midrise buildings in either commercial or residential use, with ground floor retail. Proposed zoning would allow taller residential/ mixed use buildings in areas where a network of pedestrian and open space amenities are present. In the event of conflicts between the standards of the recommended DMR/C zone and the International Special Review District regulations, that apply to areas east of 12th Avenue South, the Review District regulations would apply.

The Little Saigon community suggested that more flexibility for commercial uses would be desirable for Little Saigon. For this reason, the DMR/C (Downtown Mixed Residential/ Commercial) zone is recommended for all areas east of Interstate 5 north of S. Weller Street. The FAR limits of the DMR/C zone are consistent with existing zoning in the existing NC and C zones, though it represents an increase in allowable FAR over the existing IC zones.

Further feedback from the development community suggests that the 150’ height for buildings that contain a mid-block corridor would be a more feasible height than the previous proposals to allow only 125 feet. Therefore the final proposal includes a maximum height limit of 150 feet for residential towers under limited circumstances. In addition, standards that would regulate the future bulk and design of buildings are proposed.

The DMR/C zone is recommended for areas of Little Saigon north of S. Weller Street:

Recommended Heights in the DMR/C Zone

- Retain a base height of 65 feet throughout Little Saigon;
- Allow a height increase up to 85 feet only for residential uses through participation in the incentive zoning program; and
- Allow building height up to 150 feet only on lots greater than 40,000 square feet in size that includes a mid-block corridor. The mid-block corridor is described on page 63 of this report.

Residential Uses in the DMR/C Zone

- Allow unlimited residential density above street level retail; and
- Allow floor area above 65 feet to only be developed in residential uses through participation in the incentive zoning program.

Commercial Uses in the DMR/C Zone

The DMR/C zone is intended to provide significant commercial density and a diversity of building types, while size limits for retail uses are recommended in this area to encourage small- and medium-size businesses.

The S. Jackson Street Corridor serves as Little Saigon’s “main street,” characterized by a diversity of small businesses with lively street frontages. The extent of S. Jackson Street between Rainier Avenue S. and Interstate 5, and the intersection of 12th Avenue S. and S. Jackson Street are recommended to be designated as a Class I Pedestrian Streets to ensure the area continues to serve as a lively pedestrian-oriented commercial shopping district.

Standards in the DMR/C zone are proposed as follows:

- Establish a base commercial density of 2.5 FAR, exempting ground floor retail;
- Allow up to 4.25 FAR through participation in the downtown commercial density programs;
- Limit the size of individual businesses to 25,000 square feet; up to 50,000 square feet for multi-purpose convenience stores such as grocery stores;
- Apply a Class I Pedestrian Street designation to S. Jackson Street between Rainier Avenue S. to Interstate 5 and 12th Avenue S. between S. Main Street and S. King Street; and
- Exempt from FAR calculations up to 40,000 square feet of a streetcar maintenance base. The First Hill Streetcar project is a planned 2-mile streetcar connector serving Seattle’s Capital, First Hill and Chinatown/International District areas with connections to Link light rail and Sounder commuter rail. “Streetcar maintenance base” is defined in the Land Use Code as a “transportation facility in which a fleet of streetcars is stored, maintained and repaired.”

Class I Pedestrian Street Designation

The Class I Pedestrian Street Designation is a downtown street classification that is intended to facilitate a vibrant pedestrian-oriented commercial district. Class I Pedestrian Streets are identified on Map 1G within the Downtown chapter of the Land Use Code. The designation:

- Requires 60% façade transparency (windows at street level)
- Limits blank walls
- Requires minimum façade heights
- Limits parking located at street level
- Requires 75% of street-front facades to be occupied by pedestrian-oriented retail and service uses per SMC 23.49.009

Design Guidelines for Little Saigon Neighborhood

Neighborhood-specific design guidelines are recommended for the portion of the Little Saigon neighborhood that is outside the International Special Review District. Design guidelines inform the City’s Design Review process by articulating specific elements of preferred neighborhood character. The Design Review process allows flexibility in certain development standards to provide a better fit in neighborhoods than may otherwise be possible through prescriptive zoning requirements. Design guidelines for Little Saigon would help engage the community in neighborhood development and improve communication between developers, neighborhoods and the City early in projects’ design processes.



Little Saigon - intersection of 12th Ave S and S Jackson St - eye-level view



Little Saigon - intersection of 12th Ave S and S King St - eye-level view

Planning for Open Space and Pedestrian Connectivity

A unique feature of the Little Saigon neighborhood is very long blocks without alleys that can make the pedestrian experience challenging. In addition to Green Factor requirements that would apply throughout South Downtown (see page 92 for a discussion about the Green Factor), three Land Use Code amendments are recommended to help address the need for open space, enhanced pedestrian travel, environmental benefits from increased vegetation, and access to light and air:

Green Streets

Green Streets are designed to emphasize pedestrian amenities and landscaping in densely developed areas. They are typically located adjacent to higher-density residential or mixed use buildings on non-arterial streets. Each Green Street has its own unique character and design. The design and construction of Green Street improvements is often dependent on funding by developers in exchange for increased density or departures from Land Use Code requirements. A more complete discussion about green streets can be found on page 74 of this report.

Two green streets are proposed to provide informal pedestrian-oriented open space resources, calm traffic, and create an identifiable street character for the emerging Little Saigon residential mixed use neighborhood. Proposed Green Streets are:

- S. King Street between Rainier Avenue South and Interstate 5
- S. Weller Street between Rainier Avenue South and Interstate 5



**These depictions are presented for illustration purposes only.*

Green Streets may be constructed with or without the benefit of a street concept plan, but must meet public amenity standards and be consistent with formally adopted concept plans. Among other things, a street concept plan identifies design elements, and helps to resolve conflicts between design standards, the presence of underground utilities, and vehicle travel patterns. The development of a concept plan may be undertaken by the City, a private entity or a public agency. The Seattle Right of Way Improvements Manual identifies the process requirements for such a design.

Mid-block Corridor

In general, heights of buildings in Little Saigon would be limited to 65 or 85 feet. However, in certain circumstances, higher heights may be possible, particularly if the occupants of taller buildings and the general public can be served by a network of open spaces.

In the DMR/C zone and the DMC zone in South Downtown, a mid-block corridor is recommended as a public amenity feature for residential bonus floor area through the City's incentive zoning program. The corridor is intended to serve the need for open space and pedestrian access as residential density increases in the area.

In the DMR/C and DMC zones, buildings may be constructed to 150 feet in height if bonus floor area is gained through development of a mid-block corridor open space public amenity. Floor area above 65 feet must be in residential use only, and additional floor area may be gained only through participation in the incentive zoning program. The minimum lot size for buildings up to 150 feet is 40,000 square feet.

Buildings along the corridor must provide at least one principal entrance facing the corridor for every 100 linear feet of building along the corridor. Upper level setbacks would apply in order to allow access to light and air for building occupants and the corridor open space itself. Appendix E contains case studies of two mid-block corridor examples.

Neighborhood Scale Buildings

In order to maintain a neighborhood scale of development that is compatible with existing low-rise structures in the DMR/C zone, the following provisions are recommended:

- Building setbacks at 45 feet for buildings greater than 65 feet in height;
- Façade modulation above 45 feet for structures exceeding 85 feet in height;
- Lot coverage limits that allow 75% lot coverage over 65 feet, and 50% lot coverage over 85 feet; and
- Maximum wall dimensions of 250 feet to avoid very long single structures on the very long blocks. Portions of structures over 65 feet would be limited to 120 feet in length, with separation of upper floors by gaps of at least 25 feet.

Proposed Definition of “mid-block corridor”

“....an open space in the Downtown Urban Center east of Interstate 5 that meets the standards of 23.58A.016.F.4. The purpose of the corridor is to contribute to the network of open space resources where such open space is limited and where increased residential density is anticipated.” (Land Use Code definition)

Mid-block corridors (23.49.008.C.4) are proposed to be:

- Located a minimum of 200 feet from the nearest north-south street;
- Directly accessible from the sidewalk;
- At least 65% open to the sky;
- An average width of 25 feet;
- Accessible to the public at least ten hours per day; and
- At least one open space with a minimum dimension of 30' located along the corridor.

Parking

Parking is not required in urban centers generally, and parking as a principal use (such as pay lots not associated with a business) is discouraged. Businesses in Little Saigon, however, rely upon customers and visitors from throughout the region, particularly on weekends and festival days. Further, Little Saigon is outside the Metro free ride zone, and is less well-served by bus than other areas of Downtown.

There is community interest in allowing a principal-use parking facility that can serve area businesses in the future. Downtown parking standards are proposed to be amended to allow principal use short-term parking structure in the area east of Interstate 5 outside the International Special Review District through a conditional use process, similar to the conditions for allowing such facilities west of Interstate 5. Businesses would retain flexibility in deciding whether or not to supply new parking. Accessory commuter (long term) parking would be prohibited for more than 1 space per 1,000 square feet of nonresidential floor area.

Type of Parking	Proposed Parking Regulation in the Proposed DMR/C Zone
Parking quantity	No parking, either long-term or short-term is required. Within the ISRD, parking is required for certain uses (23.66.342).
Maximum parking	Limit parking provided to 1 space per 1,000 square feet of non-residential use (23.49.019). Within the International Special Review District (ISRD), review district provisions would apply (23.66.342).
Principal use parking garages	Allow as an administrative conditional use (amended 23.49.146)
Principal use surface parking lots	Prohibit new surface parking lots. Existing lots would be allowed as a legal, nonconforming uses. (23.49.146)
Accessory parking garages	Allow outright when on the same lot as the use they serve (23.49.146).
Accessory surface parking areas	Allow outright if less than 20 spaces outside the ISRD (23.49.146). Not permitted in the ISRD (23.66.320)
Location of parking	Location of parking is regulated per Seattle Municipal Code section 23.49.019. Parking is generally not permitted at street level unless it is separated from the street by other uses.





Summary of
Proposed Base and Bonus Development Allowed

Zone	Base Development	Maximum Development
DMR/C 65/65-85 (150)	2.5 FAR commercial uses 65 feet commercial uses 65 feet residential uses	4.25 FAR commercial 65 feet commercial uses 85 feet residential uses generally 150 feet residential uses if on a lot with a mid-block corridor